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ABSTRACT

The Texas state legislature required that the state education agency submit a report describing a systematic plan to reduce the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to 5% or less for the 1997-98 school year. The plan reported in this document updates the state's 1995-97 plan to reduce the dropout rate. For that report, 39 districts, 12 education service centers, and 16 community leaders or practitioners responded to a request to identify strategies used for dropout reduction. Strategies recognized as useful by state agency staff were added to a list of recommendations later ranked by educators and some community leaders. This report builds on those recommendations and groups the revised recommendations into categories of: (1) recommendations for continued action; (2) recommendations without fiscal implications; (3) recommendations with immediate fiscal implications; and (4) recommendations with long-term fiscal implications. The efficacy of the recommendations made in the earlier plan is apparent in the reduction in dropouts in 1994-95 (10.6%), compared to the 1987-88 dropout rate of 34.0%. Two appendixes list sources of proposed dropout reduction strategies and give an overview of the state dropout plan recommendations. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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1997-99 Report on the

Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas

December 1996

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1997-99 State Plan To Reduce The Dropout Rate

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY
AUSTIN, TEXAS
DECEMBER 1996

1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate

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1997-99 State Plan To Reduce The Dropout Rate

Executive Summary

Texas Education Code §39.182 (5), (6), and (7), Comprehensive Biennial Report, requires the central education agency to submit, "a statement of the dropout rate of students in grade levels 7 through 12, expressed in the aggregate and by grade;" "a statement of the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates for grade levels 7 through 12 for the next five years, assuming no state action is taken to reduce the dropout rate;" and "a description of a systematic plan for reducing the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to five percent or less for the 1997-1998 school year." The *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* is one component of the required report and focuses on the "description of a systematic plan for reducing the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to five percent or less for the 1997-98 school year" requirement.

The plan updates the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* by providing a status report and by providing recommendations for the 1997-99 biennium. Both sections of the plan benefited from the work of many people. The status of each 1995-97 recommendation was reported by the agency or education service center person closest to the recommendation. His or her name, affiliation and phone number appears with each 1995-97 recommendation.

Recommendations for the 1997-99 biennium benefited from input requested and received from district-level planning and decision-making committees, education service center staff, and a set of community leaders/practitioners. Each Texas superintendent was requested to place the agency's request for input on the next meeting agenda of the district's district-level planning and decision-making committee and to ask the committee to (a) review a set of proposed dropout reduction strategies for the *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (see Appendix I for a list of the proposed dropout reduction strategies and their sources), (b) assign a priority (High, Medium, or Low) to each strategy, given the dropout reduction circumstances and needs in the responding district, and (c) suggest additional dropout reduction strategies. Similar requests were made of education service center staff and participating community leaders/practitioners.

Thirty-nine districts, 12 education service centers and 16 community leaders/ practitioners responded. The average rank of each strategy was, at least medium. Additional strategies were suggested by three districts and two education service centers. Suggested strategies were evaluated by agency staff as to whether a suggested strategy would, if implemented, contribute to a reduction in the dropout rate. Those suggested strategies judged in the affirmative were added to the list of recommendations ranked by district-level planning and decision-making committees, education service center staff, and community leaders/practitioners.

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The *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* contained 18 recommendations designed to contribute to lowering the state's dropout rate and improving student achievement, including recommendations that focused on successful practices and programs, tech-prep programs, family and community support activities, and excellence and equity in student achievement. Other recommendations included:

- amendment or repeal of existing statutes in order to enhance state and local efforts to improve student achievement,
- extension of the school year,
- increased minority faculty recruitment,
- ongoing evaluation studies,
- programs for expelled youth,
- elementary, middle and high school restructuring,
- family literacy projects,
- enhanced school support services,
- increased professional staff development activities, and
- initiation of transition planning at age 14 for students with disabilities.

As may be seen from the table that follows, these initiatives may be associated with decreases in dropout rates for students in all populations. When 1987-88 and 1994-95 Texas dropout rates by ethnicity are compared, it becomes evident that while the enrollment for grades 7-12 increased, the total number of dropouts and the dropout rates for all students, including students in each population group, decreased. While it is found that the dropout rate for all students has been reduced significantly, the gap between the 1994-95 estimated longitudinal rate of 10.6 percent and the 1997-98 longitudinal rate of not more than 5 percent mandated by the 70th Texas Legislature remains to be closed.

Chart 1. TEXAS DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY

	Total Dropouts	7-12th Grade Enrollment	Annual Dropout Rate	Estimated Longitudinal Rate
1987-88				
White	38,305	744,254	5.2%	27.2%
African American	16,364	194,373	8.4%	41.0%
Hispanic	34,911	396,411	8.8%	42.5%
Other	1,727	28,160	6.1%	31.6%
Total	91,307	1,363,198	6.7%	34.0%
1994-95				
White	9,367	789,481	1.2%	6.9%
African American	5,130	217,684	2.3%	12.8%
Hispanic	14,928	556,684	2.7%	13.0%
Other	493	43,673	1.1%	6.6%
Total	29,918	1,617,522	1.8%	10.6%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, *The 1994-95 Report on Public School Dropouts*, August 1996, P. 21.

In this plan there are recommended actions to be taken by the legislature, the State Board of Education, the Agency, and other entities in order to achieve this dropout rate reduction goal. The recommendations also support efforts to assure the school success of the growing numbers of students who remain in the public schools of Texas until graduation.

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Introduction

Texas Education Code §39.182 (5), (6), and (7), Comprehensive Biennial Report, requires the central education agency to submit, "a statement of the dropout rate of students in grade levels 7 through 12 expressed in the aggregate and by grade level;" "a statement of the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates for grade levels 7 through 12 for the next five years, assuming no state action is taken to reduce the dropout rate;" and "a description of a systematic plan for reducing the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to five percent or less for the 1997-1998 school year." The *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* is one component of the required report and focuses on the "description of a systematic plan for reducing the projected cross-sectional and longitudinal dropout rates to five percent or less for the 1997-98 school year" requirement. It updates the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* by including a status report on recommendations made in the 1995 report and presents recommendations for the 1997-99 biennium. As reported below, extensive actions were taken in support of the 18 recommendations made in the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate*. The recommendations focused on realizing dropout reduction by pursuing:

- excellence and equity in student achievement for all learners in the Texas public schools,
- greater public support for public education,
- alternatives for assisting students,
- greater institutional capacity to effect dropout reduction, and
- an improved teaching force.

Recommendations for the 1997-99 biennium benefited from input requested and received from district-level planning and decision-making committees, education service center staff, and a set of community leaders/practitioners. Each Texas superintendent was requested to place the agency's request for input on the next meeting agenda of the district's district-level planning and decision-making committee and to ask the committee to (a) review a set of proposed dropout reduction strategies for the *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (see Appendix I for a list of the proposed dropout reduction strategies and their sources), (b) assign a priority (High, Medium, or Low) to each strategy, given the dropout reduction circumstances and needs in the responding district, and (c) suggest additional dropout reduction strategies. Similar requests were made of education service center staff and participating community leaders/practitioners.

Thirty-nine districts, 12 education service centers and 16 community leaders/ practitioners responded. The average rank of each strategy was, medium. Additional strategies were suggested by three districts and two education service centers. Suggested strategies were evaluated by agency staff as to whether a suggested strategy would, if implemented, contribute to a reduction in the dropout rate. Those suggested strategies judged in the affirmative were added to the list of

recommendations ranked by district-level planning and decision-making committees, education service center staff, and community leaders/practitioners.

A finding in the Agency's *1994-95 Report on Grade Level Retention of Texas Students* (September 1996) stating that "over-age students have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school in later years" taken together with findings presented in the Agency's *1992-93 Report on Public School Dropouts* (January 1995) that the "number of dropouts over-age for grade has represented a substantial portion of all dropouts since 1988-89," and a finding presented in the Agency's *1994-95 Report on Public School Dropouts* (August 1996) that "in 1994-95, 76.4 percent of dropouts were over-age for grade compared to 33.0 percent for grade 7-12 students" add credence to the recommendations made in the Agency's 1993-95 dropout reduction plan and provide a rationale for the recommendations made in the Agency's *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate*. These recommendations build on previous efforts on the part of the legislature, the State Board of Education and the Agency to reduce grade level retention and thereby effect dropout reduction.

Status Report On The 1995-97 State Plan To Reduce The Dropout Rate

In this section the 18 recommendations contained in the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* are listed, legislative actions taken are summarized, and Agency leadership activities and school district efforts in support of these recommendations are reported. The legislature addressed nine of these recommendations. The Texas Education Agency and regional education service centers addressed seven of these recommendations. School districts addressed one of these recommendations.

The recommendations made in the 1995-97 dropout reduction plan were divided into four prioritized categories:

- Recommendations for Continued Action by the Texas Education Agency included recommendations related to the continuation "of activities that the Agency had initiated during the prior two years,"
- Recommendations without Fiscal Implications "contained suggestions to amend or repeal statutes or to promote programs that had proven to be effective in reducing the number of school dropouts,"
- Recommendations with Immediate Fiscal Implications referred to "recommendations which contained fiscal requests for FY 1995-96," and
- Recommendations with Long-Term Fiscal Implications consisted of "several recommendations deferred beyond FY 1995-96, due to the limited availability of fiscal resources."

The status of the 18 recommendations made in the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* is presented using these four categories.

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1997-99 State Plan To Reduce The Dropout Rate

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUED ACTION

Recommendation #1, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Excellence and Equity.

TEA Staff Contact: Sandra Prejean, (512) 463-9670

Status: The TEA will continue to implement strategies and programs in support of its goal of excellence and equity for all students and learners served by the state's public education system. Agency leadership activities in the area of accountability include on-site peer review visits to districts and campuses. These visits are conducted when performance indicators show low performance on one or more of the indicators under T.E.C. Sections 30.051(b) (1) through (6). School year 1995-96 is the first year that the phase-in of high dropout rates has been used as an indicator of low performance for a campus or school district. Data used was collected in the 1993-94 school year.

During the 1995-96 school year, review visits were conducted at 268 low-performing campuses and 34 Accredited Warned districts. Twenty-five of the 34 Accredited Warned districts received abbreviated peer review visits due to dropout rates, and one district was visited due to low performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test and a high dropout rate. Of the 268 low-performing campuses, 116 were visited due to dropout rates. Nineteen other campuses received regular visits due to TAAS performance and dropout rates.

Texas districts have launched concerted efforts to reduce the dropout rate and improve student performance by targeting improvement in specific areas reported most often as reasons for students dropping out of school: poor attendance (40.8%); entrance into a GED program (12.0%); failure of exit-level TAAS (10.6%); pursuance of a job (9.5%); low or failing grades (6.8%); marriage (4.9%); pregnancy (3.8%); suspension/expulsion (3.4%); age (3.1%); and the return to a home country (2.7%). A sample of initiatives implemented in Texas in response to student needs include:

- attendance incentive programs;
- attendance accounting process monitoring and review;
- on- and off-campus GED programs;
- Project Recovery for expelled students;
- Adaptive Behavior Center for expelled students;
- cultural awareness;
- community service counseling;
- group/family learning centers;
- pregnant/parenting classes;
- alternative sites for accelerated learning;
- disciplinary and job training programs;

- flexible scheduling;
- reallocation of personnel to address specific dropout populations;
- increased parental involvement;
- Project Pass, an alternative school for over-aged middle school students;
- tuition-free summer school programs;
- vertical planning and communication with feeder campuses; and
- concentrated reading and writing programs.

To help facilitate excellence and equity, accreditation peer review teams most frequently made recommendations in the following areas: planning and decision-making; curriculum alignment; parental/community involvement; assistance of education service centers; and continuation/modification of existing initiatives.

The effectiveness of the efforts of school districts and campuses to reduce the dropout rate and improve student performance is shown by the reduced number of districts and campuses rated Academically Unacceptable and Low Performing for the 1996-97 school year. Only nine districts were rated Academically Unacceptable, as compared to 34 districts with this rating in the 1995-96 school year. Of these nine, only one has been so rated for a second year. In addition, of the 112 campuses rated Low Performing in the 1996-97 school year, only 29 campuses received this rating due to dropouts, compared to 116 in the previous year. Of the 29 campuses rated Low Performing due to dropouts only, 27 were rated so for the first year, and only two have been rated so for a second year.

Recommendation #2, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Assist Community Efforts to Strengthen Family Support Systems and Parent Involvement in Local School Districts.

TEA Staff Contact: Albert L. Black, (512) 475-3488

Status: The Parent Involvement and Community Empowerment initiative supports the policy directives of the Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education. Parent involvement activities are also required by the Improving America's Schools Act, the primary federal education law. The Parent Involvement and Community Empowerment Unit is a resource for regional education service centers and school districts to use in their efforts to strengthen the relationship between families, schools, and local communities. It does not mandate parent involvement, but assists and advises in these initiatives. The importance of parent involvement has been emphasized at state, federal and local levels, and it enjoys the widespread positive support of business and industry.

Collaboration is encouraged among all parties that serve children and families, where the outcomes promote educational excellence and equity for all students enrolled in the Texas public education system. The initiative has six main focus areas:

- coordinating state, regional, and local initiatives that help young children enter school ready to learn, including developmentally appropriate programs for children from birth through prekindergarten;
- providing assistance to education service centers, districts, and campuses in their efforts to enhance parent and family involvement in education;
- encouraging voluntary parenting education programs;
- promoting adult and family literacy, which contributes to the overall improvement of educational and workplace skills for children and families;
- planning with other state agencies and the business community to foster successful school-to-work transitions; and
- identifying policies that enable local communities to coordinate resources that serve the needs of students and families.

Staff has conducted numerous training workshops, seminars, and community forums to build the capacity of educators, parents, and community leaders to act as partners in education reform. The First Annual Parent Involvement Conference was held last fall, along with statewide activities associated with the first Parental Involvement Day. Legislative action directed that special education technical assistance functions of the agency be decentralized to regional education service centers. One of the functions moved to the service centers was parent coordination for parents of students with disabilities. A 20 region network has been established with staff in the special education component of each education service center. A survey/needs assessment was developed by Region IX Education Service Center and was sent to the parent contact/specialist at each education service center. The results of the survey have been compiled and will be distributed to the 20 region service center network.

Recommendation #3, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Tech-Prep Initiatives.

TEA Staff Contact: Hank Madeley, (512) 463-9446

Status: Tech-Prep initiatives provide comprehensive school-to-work transitions with a systemic approach to work force education. Tech-Prep has created an environment that supports relevant education, regional diversity, and equal access for all students.

Twenty-five Tech-Prep consortia use targeted occupational information from Quality Work Force Planning Committees to develop plans outlining rigorous academic and technical course work that starts in the ninth grade and culminates in an advanced associate's degree earned at a two-year post-secondary school. Multiple entry and exit points are possible, as is continuation through a baccalaureate degree. Local work force development boards now replace Quality Work Force Planning Committees, but will continue to provide local labor market information to Tech-Prep consortia.

The consortia serve as umbrella organizations to provide opportunities through which educators, service providers, employers, parents, students and the community can all work together. Both employers' and individual students' needs are served through Tech-Prep curricula, which advocates strong parent and community involvement. Approximately 528 of the 663 school districts that have high schools have approved Tech-Prep plans.

Originally, Tech-Prep was developed through a tri-agency partnership between the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), and the Texas Department of Commerce to support comprehensive educational restructuring and strengthen the connection between school and work. The agency will continue to cooperate with the THECB regarding Tech-Prep at the secondary level. The agency will work closely to review Tech-Prep plans, which, as of March 1, 1996, are now handled by the THECB.

Recommendation #4, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Fund Programs that Increase the Number of Minority Teachers and Administrators to Reflect the Ethnic Composition of the State.

Region I ESC Contact: Annabel Pena, (210) 383-5611

Status: Agency management of the Texas Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Assistance (TTRRA) Program was transferred to the Region I Education Service Center. The program is operated in six education service center regions where high numbers of permits are issued, and in four universities, called 'academies.'

The program has several initiatives:

- Utilizing Network Interactive Technology Efficiently (UNITE) recruits certified teachers through the use of technology, providing information to personnel directors and other interested parties;
- the Leadership Enhancement Academy (LEA) Center at Johns Hopkins University in El Paso works with school administrators to recruit staff and improve professional development and support systems for minority and bilingual teachers through meetings, professional development academies, monthly publications, and school activities;
- Bridging the Educational Scene for Teachers of Tomorrow (BESTT), a five-year pilot program to recruit academically talented minority high school students into the education profession, was recently recognized as a state-approved honors course, and instruction in teaching using technology is planned;
- the first student chapter of the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in Texas has been established at the University of Texas Pan American;
- review sessions for the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET) are held to assist teachers on permit to be certified in their teaching areas, targeting areas of greatest need: Professional Development, Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Early Childhood, and Elementary Education; and
- continued efforts to assist and encourage paraeducators to become certified teachers through workshops, conferences, and scholarships. The Houston Community College program promoting certification in bilingual education has been replicated in part at South Texas Community College's "T-square" program, and a video is available. The Mentor Training Academy at Southwest Texas State University supports paraeducators as they pursue a degree in education. These programs provide materials, strategies, assistance and direction towards teaching careers to college students from diverse backgrounds.

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Recommendation #5, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Provide Information to School Districts About Programs That Have Kept Homeless Children and Youth From Dropping Out of School.

ESC Region X Contact: Steve Hale, (214) 231-6301

Status: Support services to assist school districts with dropout prevention that specifically target students that are homeless or are at-risk of being homeless are provided through funding from the federal Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. The McKinney Act requires that schools enroll and educate homeless students, to ensure that there will be no barriers that prevent homeless children and youth from attending school. Changes in the Texas Education Code enacted in response to the McKinney Act have enabled homeless students to enroll and attend school in a district regardless of where they reside. Homelessness has also been added to the list of criteria for admission to pre-K programs in Texas. All homeless pre-K students are now eligible to enroll in pre-K programs with no need to satisfy any additional enrollment criteria.

Management of these activities is handled through the Region X Education Service Center. Currently, there are 15 McKinney Homeless Education subgrants that have been awarded to local education agencies, providing direct assistance to homeless students in 28 Texas school districts. Each program has a homeless liaison that works to resolve specific difficulties that a homeless student in their district may have in enrolling and attending school. Approximately 20,000 homeless students received direct educational services through local subgrants in the 1995-96 school year. These services included before- and after-school tutoring, summer classes, assessment and diagnostic services, transportation, counseling, health care, school supplies, clothing, and family support. Information about successful dropout recovery programs such as Project HELP (Homeless Education Learning Program) is provided to participating districts at meetings throughout the year and at educational workshops and conferences statewide. Coordination of existing fund sources is also encouraged, and examples of programs implemented in school districts have been highlighted.

In addition to the direct services to homeless children through the McKinney subgrants, countless other students have benefited indirectly from the collaboration, improved awareness, dispute resolution, and policy-making activities resulting from McKinney Act requirements. The Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, located in the Dana Center (at the University of Texas at Austin) operates a toll-free hotline from which it resolves concerns received from across the state regarding the enrollment and attendance of homeless children and youth. The office also conducts staff development workshops and in-service activities to update and inform educators about their responsibilities related to the education of students who are homeless. As a result of these activities, more Texas children and youth who are homeless are receiving more comprehensive support that enables them to enroll and attend school than at any previous time.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITHOUT FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #6, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Encourage Districts to Develop and Promote Programs that Allow for Flexible Credit Options (Flexible Scheduling and Competency-Based Award of Credit) for Migrant and Other Students.

TEA Staff Contact: Bob Trevino, (512) 463-9067

Status: Districts have developed and promoted several flexible credit options for migrant students including credit by examination in conjunction with The University of Texas' Migrant Program, Project SMART (Summer Migrants Access Resources through Technology) course offerings, and extended day or Saturday classes. Some districts offer night classes and alternative education programs, as well as Migrant Lab courses offered through the Portable Assisted Study Sequence and the American Preparatory Institute. Workshops presented by the Texas Migrant Interstate Program (TMIP), the University of Texas' Migrant Program, education service centers, and districts are held to inform parents, students, and school staff about flexible credit options for migrant students. The Texas Migrant Student Transfer Packet System (TMSTPS), administered by the TMIP, includes information on empowering parents and students, along with a training guide for districts and education service centers to use in parent training workshops. Open enrollment opportunities remain critical for migrant students. Flexibility, regardless of the date of enrollment, is needed for students to reach their educational goals. Competency-based award of credit allows for more flexibility than required hours of attendance.

Recommendation #7, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Allow More Flexibility in the High School Equivalency Examination Pilot Program (T.E.C. 11.35).

TEA Staff Contact: Carolyn Klein, (512) 463-9294

Status: Revisions to the Texas Education Code deleted Section 11.35, which enabled the State Board of Education to support the program and allowed for more flexibility in the program. Approximately 350 school districts operate in-school GED programs within guidelines established by the Texas Education Agency, in cooperation with the national GED Testing Service.

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Recommendation #8, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Amend the Provision for Schools' Mandatory Participation in the High School Equivalency Examination Pilot Program (T.E.C. 11.35).

TEA Staff Contact: Carolyn Klein, (512) 463-9294

Status: Legislative revisions deleted Section 11.35, which eliminated the requirement for mandatory participation, and now Section 7.111 allows for maximum local flexibility in district decisions to offer the program on a continuous basis, in response to local needs. Approximately 350 school districts have applied for the program since 1989. The majority of the programs are in operation within the parameters established by the Texas Education Agency in cooperation with the GED Testing Service.

Recommendation #9, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Standardize Entry/Exit Criteria for Dropout Reduction Programs.

TEA Staff Contact: Madeleine Manigold, (512) 463-9370

Status: Revisions made to the Texas Education Code provide maximum local flexibility to school districts to serve students in at-risk situations, including students at-risk of dropping out of school. The definitions of students who are in at-risk situations are defined in law. The State Board of Education no longer has rule-making authority for this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH IMMEDIATE FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #10, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Extend Teacher Contracts to Increase Professional Development Time by Five Days Per Year to Ten Days in FY 1997.

TEA Staff Contact: Sharon Jackson, (512) 463-7769

Status: Legislative revisions to the Texas Education Code did not address extending teachers' contracts by five days per year incrementally to 20 days in FY 1999. The revisions provided for three days of staff development in 1995-96 and five days of staff development in 1996-97. Educator professional development continues to be a critical component in the improvement of instructional services. Staff development to maintain the minimum acceptable level of proficiency is quickly expended in the five days currently provided by law, which does not accommodate the increasing professional demand for high levels of proficiency. In an effort to increase time available for professional development, school districts have continued to request waivers. Approximately 900 waivers were granted for the 1995-96 school year.

Recommendation #11, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Increase Family Literacy and Parent Involvement Programs.

TEA Staff Contact: Pavlos Roussos, (512) 463-9294

Status: In 1995, the State Board of Education adopted the Policy Statement on Adult Education and Literacy, which endorsed a leadership initiative for family literacy. This policy statement was developed with broad-based field input and an extensive public hearings process. Forty-two family literacy projects are funded by the federal Even Start Family Literacy Program. Local school districts serve as fiscal agents or project partners. There has been a high level of interest expressed by school districts in implementing more family literacy programs. The agency has also funded an adult education special project that provides family literacy technical assistance to school districts. Although state funding was requested in order to increase family literacy programs, additional state funds have not been provided.

Recommendation #12, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Analyze the Concept of Students in At-Risk Situations to Improve its Usefulness in Directing Limited Education Resources.

TEA Staff Contact: Nancy Stevens, (512) 463-9701

Status: Although the agency has not conducted additional work in this area due to lack of funding, the recommendation focuses on a subject in need of future research.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH LONG-TERM FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #13, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Provide Additional State Support for Programs for Expelled Youth.

TEA Staff Contact: Larry Garcia, (512) 463-7915

Status: Texas Education Code Chapter 37.011 requires every county with over 125,000 students to provide a Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program (JJAEP), beginning September 1, 1996. The Texas Juvenile Probation Commission reports that 22 counties meet these criteria. Approximately 30 other counties with student populations of less than 125,000 are expected to voluntarily establish JJAEPs by the end of the 1996-97 school year. The numbers of students participating in these programs range from an estimated 20 students in Tarrant County, to possibly 290 students in Bexar County. The JJAEP provides educational programs to students who have committed infractions of local student codes of conduct.

Texas Education Code Chapter 37.008 requires that every school district have an Alternative Education Program (AEP) for students who have committed infractions of local student codes of conduct. Counties and school districts can jointly develop the codes of conduct and conditions for transfer to the AEP. These programs do not require prior approval by the Texas Education Agency.

The agency has implemented an optional Alternative Accountability System for alternative campuses that serve long-term (18 weeks or longer) students. The system was developed in 1994-95, and provides for rating alternative campuses based on student performance on TAAS, dropout rates, attendance, GED completion, course/credit completion, and/or dropout recovery rates. The system also provides for on-site evaluations by peer review teams for those alternative campuses that fail to meet targeted campus performance objectives. The system includes both campuses that provide educational programs for students in at-risk situations, as described in T.E.C. Chapter 29.081(d), and campuses that provide educational programs for students who have had discipline-related school problems.

Of the 257 campuses registered in the Alternative Accountability System, 121 are categorized as "Multiple Alternative Campuses" where school district educational services are provided for students in at-risk situations; some of the campuses have classes for students with disciplinary problems provided separately from the regular program. Cooperative Alternative Programs (40) provide similar programs through a cooperative arrangement with several school districts. There are 39 campuses that are exclusively Disciplinary Campuses, and 5 that serve expelled youth. Two types of JJAEPs are registered, those that are required (22) and those registering voluntarily (30). These campuses are projected to serve 26,451 students by the end of the 1996-97 school year.

The system, managed within the Division of Non-Traditional School and Special Education Accountability and Development, contains only those AEP campuses that chose to participate in the Alternative Accountability System. Other AEP campuses that were rated within the regular system are not included in this system. These campuses generally serve students on a short-term basis. Some AEPs are provided within a regular campus, and may serve students on a short- and long-term basis; these are not included in the Alternative Accountability System. These programs report performance data to the regular campus to which the students are assigned.

Recommendation #14, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Phase-In the Extended School Year Initiative to all School Districts in the State.

TEA Staff Contact: B. J. Gibson, (512) 463-9374

Status: There is strong agreement between the legislature and the State Board of Education on the need for an alternative to retention. As a result of legislative support for the Retention Reduction Pilot Program during 1993-1995, retention in the pilot schools declined for students in grades 1 and 2. An appropriation of $5 million for competitive grants allowed 53 school districts to provide up to 30 additional days of accelerated instruction for students in first grade who would otherwise have been retained. The following year these districts received an additional $5 million to provide similar extended-year programs to newly eligible first grade students and follow-up support to the original cohort group.

The Optional Extended Year Program for students in kindergarten through grade 8 was authorized by a new provision in the Texas Education Code, Section 29.082. Funding was provided by a 5 percent maximum set-aside from the state compensatory education allotment. Districts identified as having a high concentration of educationally disadvantaged students were eligible to apply individually or through shared services arrangements. Districts that participated in the 1994-95 Retention Reduction Pilot Program were eligible to apply. The 1994-95 pilot programs are required to collect and report longitudinal performance data to the agency covering the three school years: 1993-94, 1994-95, and 1995-97. The report is due October 15, 1997.

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Recommendation #15, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Provide Counselors on Each Campus to Deliver a Comprehensive Developmental Guidance Program for All Students.

TEA Staff Contact: John Lucas, (512) 463-9498

Status: Beginning in 1991, state compensatory education funds were used for the purpose of planning, implementing, and evaluating comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling programs on elementary school campuses. In 1993 legislative funding authorization increased the amount to $7,500,000. Interest in the program is strong. Over 200 districts have applied for this competitive grant application funding. Sixty-seven districts are funded to employ approximately 235 elementary school counselors. The 1996-97 funding was contingent upon the quality of the implementation and management of the project and the degree to which the district achieved the program objectives and activities described in its application. Funding for the 1997-98 school year will be through a continuation application based on quality implementation and management of the previous contract.

Recommendation #16, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Require Individual Transition Plans (ITPs) for all Students Receiving Special Education Services by 14 Years of Age (or younger as appropriate) Provided that Sufficient New Funds are Allocated.

TEA Staff Contact: Gene Lenz, (512) 463-9414

Status: The agency was directed to study the possible effects of amending T.E.C., Section 29.011 to require the development of an individual transition plan for each child who is at least 14 years of age. The agency is required to submit a report to the governor and the legislature on the effects of changing the age requirement no later than November 15, 1996. Data for this report will be requested from districts through education service centers. Analysis will include estimates of numbers of students affected, the cost associated with developing ITPs for each student, and statements of impact if this change is adopted by the legislature.

Recommendation #17, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Conduct Ethnographic Research to Discover and Document What Happens in Successful Schools and Programs.

TEA Staff Contact: Nancy Stevens, (512) 463-9701

Status: The Statewide Texas Educational Progress Study, Report No. 2, Case Studies of Successful Campuses: Responses to a High-Stakes State Accountability System, features three educational sites, one at elementary, middle, and high school levels, that meet certain selection criteria: (1) high proportions of minority and economically disadvantaged populations; (2) high performance on accountability system indicators; (3) student enrollment greater than 750 for middle school and greater than 1000 for high school; and (4) at least two years of performance data. The study focused on campus improvements that resulted in success. Too often test results for members of minority populations are disappointing, and the demographic composition of the campus is used as an excuse for those poor results and as justification for failure to improve over long periods of time. The agency supports continued analysis in this area; additional agency studies have not been funded at this time.

Recommendation #18, 1995-97 State Dropout Plan

Elementary, Middle and High School Restructuring.

TEA Staff Contact: Kathy Stewart, (512) 463-9563

Status: The Texas Elementary, Middle and High School Mentor Network activities and programs are designed to promote maximum educational achievement through the use of various educational strategies that expand the range of options for successful classroom practices and institutional leadership. The Texas Mentor School Network (TMSN) provides statewide leadership and support for excellence in public education. Through this leadership and support, schools can restructure and reduce retention and the dropout rate. Currently there are 59 elementary, 65 middle, and 35 high school Mentor Campuses, for a total of 159 statewide. All 20 regions in Texas are represented, as well as urban, rural, and suburban areas. The mentor network also reflects various cultures and school enrollments. All campuses are accountable for their performance and are required to submit reports periodically. Statewide mentor schools' administration, formerly at the state agency level, is now located in the Region XIII Education Service Center, to provide leadership, support, and technical assistance to school campuses at the local level.

Recommendations For The 1997-99 State Plan To Reduce The Dropout Rate

The proposed *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* is a blueprint for lowering the state's dropout rate and improving student achievement. The plan has twelve recommendations presented under four prioritized categories:

- Recommendations for Continued Action by the Texas Education Agency includes recommendations related to the continuation "of activities that the Agency has initiated during the prior two years,"
- Recommendations without Fiscal Implications "contains suggestions to amend or repeal statutes or to promote programs that have proven to be effective in reducing the number of school dropouts,"
- Recommendations with Immediate Fiscal Implications refers to "recommendations which contain fiscal requests for FY 1995-96," and
- Recommendations with Long-Term Fiscal Implications consist of "several recommendations deferred beyond FY 1995-96, due to the limited availability of fiscal resources."

These recommendations are listed here for the reader's convenience. An overview of these recommendations is presented in Appendix II of this document.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 1997-99 STATE PLAN TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE

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1997-99 STATE PLAN TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUED ACTION

Recommendation #1, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Review and Evaluate the Criteria and Procedures Used to Identify Students as Being At-Risk of Dropping Out

TEA Staff Contact: Nancy Stevens, (512) 563-9701

The Problem: The 1994-95 dropout data show that less than half of all dropouts are identified as at-risk of school failure or dropping out, while under current state and local at-risk criteria, over 40 percent of all secondary students are identified as being at-risk of dropping out of school.

The Solution: Further analysis of factors that lead to dropping out, or that deter those from doing so could provide information useful in targeting limited resources more successfully. Such analysis might also provide valuable input into changes to state statutes and State Board of Education rules.

Fiscal Implications: To be determined.

Recommendation #2, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Assist Community Efforts to Strengthen Family Support Systems and Parent Involvement in Local School Districts.

TEA Staff Contact: Albert L. Black, (512) 475-3488

The Problem: There is a continuing need to involve parents in the education of their children, including neglected and delinquent students and students with disabilities, as well as a need for support systems available to parents and students. There is also a need for significant numbers of peer and adult mentors for school-age youth.

The Solution: The agency should continue to provide assistance to education service centers in order to build stronger support for parents and students in the school districts. District efforts which promote community and school planning to connect parents and students with resources should be encouraged. The Agency should continue to assist education service centers as they encourage districts to integrate and coordinate family and community-based programs with academic program activities. Local districts should be encouraged to identify barriers to greater parental involvement in their communities. Schools should be encouraged to integrate strategies with programs such as Head Start, Even Start, the Parents As Teachers Program, and the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

Fiscal Implications: Existing resources would be involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITHOUT FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #3, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Provide Opportunities for Parents to Become Involved in Their Children's Education and Participate in Dropout Prevention and Intervention Efforts.

TEA Staff Contact: Albert L. Black, (512) 475-3488

The Problem: There is a need for more parent involvement in dropout prevention--too often parents are requested to become involved in efforts to recover students after school attendance has become irregular.

The Solution: School districts and campuses, especially those that have been identified as having high dropout rates, should develop parent/school/community collaborations that emphasize the importance of regular school attendance, address the reasons why students drop out of school, and plan interventions that address the identified barriers to school attendance.

Fiscal Implications: To be determined.

Recommendation #4, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Encourage School Districts to Increase Career and Technology Programs and Continue to Push for Academic and Technical Integration and Contextual/Applied Learning.

TEA Staff Contact: Walter Tillman, (512) 463-9322

The Problem: Frequently, it is assumed that when academic and technical integration is implemented it will automatically result in improved student learning. Many teachers of core curriculum subjects resist becoming involved in reform measures that require them to change or modify their approach to instruction. Teachers of core curricular courses often are not sufficiently familiar with workplace technology or the day-to-day operations of business and industry to develop effective workplace-related learning activities for students. Before teachers can employ an integrated methodology, sufficient planning and training must be conducted. In addition, counselors will often treat integrated or applied courses as low-level classes and place only the weakest academic student in these courses.

The Solution: Student learning from a contextual perspective has benefits. Contextual learning theory suggests that mastery of subject matter content by students happens better when students process new concepts in a way that makes sense in their own world (Hull and Pedrotti, 1995). A solution is to develop a curriculum and pedagogical approach in which students discover relationships between abstract ideas and real-world workplace applications. If students see relevance and meaning in what they learn, they are more likely to be motivated and maintain a high interest in what they learn -- and remain in school.

Fiscal Implications: To be determined.

Recommendation #5, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Provide a Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program that Provides All Students With the Necessary Life Skills to be Successful in School and to Become Productive Citizens.

TEA Staff Contact: Yvette Henley, (512) 463-9498

The Problem: Students are subject to unprecedented social stress, including fragmentation of the family, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, poverty, violence, and suicide. Symptoms of these stresses include under achievement, school disinterest, classroom disruption, truancy and/or dropout. Early and appropriate intervention can prevent or mitigate those conditions which lead to failure and loss to society of fully functioning and competent adults.

Professionals concerned with education recognize that, in addition to intellectual challenges, students must overcome personal, social, organizational, and institutional challenges that could place them at risk of educational failure and dropping out of school. Intervention that addresses these challenges is essential. A comprehensive guidance program directed by a professionally trained counselor is a critical component of the school's prevention efforts.

The Solution: The comprehensive developmental guidance program in Texas public schools is an integral part of the total educational program. It provides a systematic planned approach for helping all students acquire and apply basic life skills by making optional use of the special knowledge and skills of school counselors. The foundation of the program is to provide developmentally appropriate assistance for all students, and at the same time provide special assistance to those who need it. Rather than devise a program for "special" populations of students, implement a comprehensive, developmental guidance program that will address the needs of all students. The Comprehensive Guidance Program for Texas Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development Pre-K-12th Grade is available for use by districts in implementing this program. It provides all students with the necessary life skills to enable them to be productive citizens.

Fiscal Implications: None.

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Recommendation #6, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Promote Collaboration Among Schools, Businesses and Community Organizations in Providing Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs.

TEA Staff Contact: Walter Tillman, (512) 463-9322

The Problem: An inadequate number of collaboratives exist, such as school/business/community partnerships, to meet the needs of students viewed as educationally fragile. Fragmented efforts by schools do not take advantage of potential resources available within businesses and various organizations in the community. Many rural schools are extremely challenged in this area.

The Solution: Agency staff and RESC staff should facilitate networking existing established collaboratives with schools without such arrangements. Agency staff should encourage formation of new collaboratives with rural schools to provide students with real-world connections between school and the workplace.

Fiscal Implications: None.

Recommendation #7, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Teach All School Personnel to Recognize Signs of Possible Substance Abuse and the Procedures to Follow if There is a Suspicion of Abuse, and Train Specific Personnel to Deal with Those Concerns.

TEA Staff Contact: Kay Beth Stavley, (512) 463-9374

The Problem: The Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse 1994 School Survey of Substance Use indicates that the use of illicit drugs has risen since 1992. The emergence of new drugs and the increase in marijuana use, as well as the on-going prevalence of alcohol use among young people, indicates a need for more emphasis on the recognition of signs and symptoms of drug use. For school personnel working with students at-risk of dropping out, the recognition of the relationship between their behavior and the signs and symptoms of substance abuse may mean the difference between success and failure. School personnel must be aware of the prevention, intervention and referral resources available to deal with concerns in the area of substance abuse. Sustained and on-going professional development is needed in the training of all school personnel to recognize signs of possible substance abuse and the procedures to follow to access the resources available for intervention and referral.

The Solution: Training in the recognition of signs and symptoms of drug use and the procedures to follow for intervention and referral may be continued through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Professional Development Program. Each education service center in the state provides technical assistance, professional development, professional development resources in prevention, and referral resources for all schools in their respective regions through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Professional Development Program.

Fiscal Implications: None.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH IMMEDIATE FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #8, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Coordinate State, District, and Community Efforts to Reduce the Dropout Rate. Link Academic, Guidance, and Career Education Programs in this Effort.

TEA Staff Contact: **Ward McCain, (512) 463-9446**

The Problem: Students drop out of school for complex reasons. Many drop out because they are over-age for their grade level. Often students do not see the relevance of school to their future lives. Personal circumstances may force some students to leave school to earn wages; others may find it necessary to leave school to care for a child or sick family member. While many programs exist at state, district, and community levels to assist potential dropouts, these programs often address only a portion of student problems. Increased coordination is necessary.

The Solution: Encourage increased coordination of dropout reduction efforts involving state agencies, school districts, parents, businesses, and other elements of communities. Coordinated efforts form a support net that makes it less likely potential dropouts will slip through the cracks. Individuals responsible for separate state, district, and community programs should meet regularly to understand the student and/or family needs each program serves, link programs when appropriate or beneficial, and develop ways to assist potential dropouts. Among the efforts and actions that should be more closely coordinated are the following:

- Encourage school districts to develop and/or expand career guidance and counseling programs and career development programs for grades K-12. It is never too early for students to learn about career opportunities and begin establishing a vision for their future. Encourage parents to be involved in their child's career development program.
- Promote the development of career pathways/clusters for all Texas students. Workplace skills should be infused into the curriculum, and goal-setting and career plan selection should be encouraged for students in grades 5-8. The development of these pathways/clusters should be linked with career guidance and counseling programs and career development programs. Well-planned career pathways, when coupled with appropriate career guidance and career development programs, provide students with career goals and a road map with which to reach these goals. Students who have a firm, positive vision based on education are more likely to stay in school, succeed, and graduate. Involve parents in the selection of the career pathway/cluster their child will follow.
- Encourage schools to provide work-based job shadowing experiences and/or workplace internships for teachers to improve teachers' knowledge of the workplace, and to promote improved knowledge among the business community regarding the needs of students and the education system.

- Encourage schools to integrate academic and career and technology education and use extensive contextual learning strategies to enhance student learning and help students see the relevance of education to their lives outside the classroom. Students who see the importance of education are more likely to stay in school and graduate.
- Promote the development of more support programs for pregnant/ parenting students so that these students do not have to leave school to care for a child.
- Encourage school districts to develop more alternative campuses with flexible hours that allow students to complete their studies while attending to personal responsibilities.
- Encourage school districts and Tech-Prep consortia to expand the number and scope of Tech-Prep programs, which are coordinated efforts between school districts and postsecondary institutions that link four years of secondary education with at least two years of postsecondary education.

Fiscal Implications: Texas anticipates receiving a federal grant under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act. If the grant is not received, the agency will request state appropriations of approximately $500,000 to support these activities.

Recommendation #9, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Continue to Phase-In the Extended School Year Initiative to All School Districts in the State. Maintain Local District Options to Participate in Extended-Year Programs.

TEA Staff Contact: **Hellen Bedgood, (512) 463-9374**

The Problem: The most recent retention statistics for the state of Texas, contained in *The Report on Grade Level Retention of Texas Students, 1994-95* (Texas Education Agency, 1996), indicate the highest percentage of students retained was in the ninth grade and the second highest in the first grade. In 1992-93, 21,065 students were retained in the first grade which reflects a retention rate of 7.7%. Approximately one out of six ninth grade students repeated the ninth grade.

The Solution: Continue to phase-in the extended-year programs to all schools in the state and extend the k-8 Optional Extended Year Program to include ninth grade students. A significant decrease in student retention in 1993-94 can be partially attributed to the Retention Reduction Pilot Programs instituted in the 1993-94 school year.

Fiscal Implications: To be determined.

Source: General Revenue.

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Recommendation #10, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Furnish Districts with Dropout Reduction Research Findings.

TEA Staff Contact: **Hellen Bedgood, (512) 463-9374**

The Problem: Quantitative data furnished to districts and campuses through the Academic Excellence Indicator System and the Annual Report on Public School Dropouts provide information about the number and characteristics of dropouts, as well as trends in dropout rates. However, these data do not tell districts why students drop out of school or what kinds of programs have been successful in reducing the dropout rate for different student groups.

The Solution: Provide districts with information about findings from state and national research on dropouts and dropout reduction programs to complement the descriptive data currently provided. Include research findings that focus on specify student groups such as Hispanic students.

Fiscal Implications: To be determined.

Recommendation #11, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Provide Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers and Support Staff in Early Identification, Intervention and Effective Instructional Techniques for Students At-Risk of Dropping Out of School.

TEA Staff Contact: **Cory Green, (512) 463-9374**

The Problem: Sufficient staff development time must be provided for teachers to enable them to participate as full partners in the determination of student and campus goals and to attain, on an ongoing basis, knowledge and training in the best practices to meet those goals. The staff development provided should continue to contribute to the closing of the gap between schools that have and have not assured the success of enrolled students. Even though the achievement gap between subgroups is not "closed," significant progress is being made to close the gap. In order to continue making progress, sustained professional development refocused from remediation to acceleration is needed. Additional resources from education service centers will be required.

The Solution: The Texas Education Agency will continue to implement strategies and programs in support of its goal of excellence and equity for all students and learners served by the state's public education system. A key strategy requires that teacher employment contracts be extended by five days for a total of ten professional development days for FY 98 while maintaining 180 instructional days. Sufficient staff development time will enable teachers to participate as full partners in the determination of student and campus goals. Additional staff development time could allow the continuation and expansion of training to include such training as the signs and symptoms of drug abuse, violence, and behavior of students in at-risk situations which is currently available through the

Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program at each Educational Service Center. Staff development should be provided with contextual/applied learning strategies and real-world applications of academic skills. The Texas Education Agency will continue to support staff development efforts through the current and future technology initiatives including Texas School Telecommunication Access Resource (T-STAR), Texas Education Network (TENET), Texas Center for Educational Technology (TCET), Texas Education Telecommunications Network (TETN), Centers for Professional Development and Technology (CPDT), Technology Preview and Training Centers, Technology Demonstration Sites (PETs) and the Texas Library Connection (TLC).

Fiscal Implications: $900 million is needed to fund increasing professional development to ten days for FY 98.

Source: Foundation School Program.

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RECOMMENDATIONS WITH LONG-TERM FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendation #12, 1997-99 State Dropout Plan

Implement Alternative Academic Education Programs for Students in At-Risk Situations Such as Evening/Weekend Classes, Credit By Examination, and Credit for Work Experience.

TEA Staff Contact: **Carolyn Klein, (512) 463-9294**

The Problem: Most local education agencies have not yet developed programs that have the above named characteristics because of limited resources, a limited supply of teachers, or underutilized employers or community-based agencies that would provide work opportunities.

The Solution: Some models for successful programs exist. A few alternative academic programs enable enrolled students to combine study toward a Certificate of General Educational Development simultaneously with progress toward a high school diploma. Some progressive school districts have recognized that the knowledge and skills necessary to pass the Tests of General Educational Development have common elements with those necessary to earn credit in key high school courses. These school districts design their programs so that students study, demonstrate mastery, and receive credit for learning that has taken place. Documentation of learning is expressed in terms of the requirements for earning credit in state credit courses. These programs are conducted throughout the traditional school day and, in some cases, in the evening. Students are eligible for credit by examination, as other students are. Schools have the authority to award credit for work experience, and this often is an important element of successful programs. Work experience includes work for pay and voluntary services. Educators in these progressive programs agree that early identification of capable students who need flexibility increases the likelihood that the students will complete the requirements for a high school diploma rather than earning a Certificate of General Education and withdrawing from school.

Since the mid 1970s, adult educators have offered competency-based high school diploma programs for individuals who are not enrolled in school. Currently, adult educators are tracking the development of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills to ensure that competency-based high school diploma programs for adult students maintain their quality. Instruction is offered at times and locations that have been selected in response to needs assessments. Students are eligible for credit by examination, as other students are. The school district that awards the high school diploma makes policies regarding credit by examination and credit for work experience. These models could be replicated by other local education agencies following thorough needs assessment and planning.

Conclusion

Action taken by the Legislature, the State Board of Education, the Texas Education Agency, Education Service Centers, local school districts, local school communities and other stakeholders have resulted in a significant reduction in the number and rate of students leaving the public schools of Texas prior to graduation. An overall view of results of these actions may be seen from the table that follows.

Chart 1: TEXAS DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY

	Total Dropouts	7-12th Grade Enrollment	Annual Dropout Rate	Estimated Longitudinal Rate
1987-88				
White	38,305	744,254	5.2%	27.2%
African American	16,364	194,373	8.4%	41.0%
Hispanic	34,911	396,611	8.8%	42.5%
Other	1,727	28,160	6.1%	31.6%
Total	91,307	1,363,198	6.7%	34.0%
1994-95				
White	9,367	789,481	1.2%	6.9%
African American	5,130	217,684	2.3%	12.8%
Hispanic	14,928	556,684	2.7%	15.0%
Other	493	43,673	1.1%	6.6%
Total	29,918	1,617,522	1.8%	10.6%

SOURCE: Texas Education Agency, *The 1994-95 Report on Public School Dropouts*, August 1996, P. 21

It may be seen from the above chart that there were 29,918 (10.6 percent) dropouts in 1994-95 compared to 91,307 (34.0 percent) dropouts in 1987-88. The recommendations made in the *1997-99 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* are designed to further contribute to lowering the state's dropout rate and improving student achievement.

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APPENDIX I
SOURCES OF DROPOUT REDUCTION STRATEGIES

STRATEGIES	SOURCES
1. Review and evaluate the criteria and procedures used to identify students as being at-risk of dropping out of school.	*Academics 2000*, p. 15. *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20. Recommendations of the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (#12). In *Academics 2000*, p. 17.
2. Continue to assist community efforts to strengthen family support systems and parent involvement in local school districts.	*Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20. Recommendations of the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (#2). In *Academics 2000*, p. 17.
3. Provide opportunities for parents to become involved in their children's education and participate in dropout prevention and intervention programs.	*Academics 2000*, p. 15. *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20. *Academics 2000*, p. 17.
4. Encourage school districts to increase vocational programs and continue the push for academic and technical integration.	Field Recommendation
5. Continue to provide a comprehensive developmental guidance and counseling program that provides all students with the necessary life skills to be successful in school and to become productive citizens.	Field Recommendation
6. Promote collaboration among schools, businesses and community organizations in providing dropout prevention and intervention programs.	*Academics 2000*, p. 15.

7. Teach all school personnel to recognize signs of possible substance abuse and the procedures to follow if there is a suspicion of abuse, and train specific personnel to deal with those concerns.	Field Recommendation
8. Coordinate state, district, and community efforts to reduce the dropout rate. Link academic, guidance, and career education programs in this effort.	*Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20.
9. Continue to phase-in the extended school year initiative to all school districts in the state. Maintain local district options to participate in extended-year programs.	*Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20. Recommendations of the *1995-97 State Plan to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (#14). In *Academics 2000*, p. 17.
10. Furnish districts with dropout reduction research findings.	Commissioner's August 3, 1995 press conference.
11. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and support staff in early identification, intervention, and effective instructional techniques for students at risk of dropping out of school.	*Academics 2000*, p. 15. *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 19. *Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1996-2000*, p. 20.
12. Implement alternative academic education programs for at-risk students, such as evening/weekend classes, credit by examination, and credit for work experience.	*Academics 2000*, p. 15.

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APPENDIX II

Overview of the 1997-99 State Dropout Plan Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTINUED ACTION

(1) Review and Evaluate the Criteria and Procedures Used to Identify Students as Being At-Risk of Dropping Out.

Further analysis of factors that lead to dropping out, or that deter those from doing so could provide information useful in targeting limited resources more successfully. Such analysis might also provide valuable input into changes to state statutes and State Board of Education rules.

(2) Continue to Assist Community Efforts to Strengthen Family Support Systems and Parent Involvement in Local School Districts.

The Agency should continue to provide assistance to education service centers in order to build stronger support for parents and students in the school district. District efforts that promote community and school planning to connect parents and students with resources should be encouraged. The Agency should continue to assist education service centers as they encourage districts to integrate and coordinate family and community-based programs with academic program activities. Local districts should be encouraged to identify barriers to greater parental involvement in their communities. Schools should be encouraged to integrate strategies with programs such as Head Start, Even Start, The Parents As Teachers Program, and the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

RECOMMENDATIONS WITHOUT FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

(3) Provide Opportunities for Parents to Become Involved in Their Children's Education and Participate in Dropout Prevention and Intervention Efforts.

School districts and campuses, especially those that have been identified as having high dropout rates, should develop parent/school/community collaborations that emphasize the importance of regular school attendance, address the reasons why students dropout of school, and plan interventions that address the identified barriers to school attendance.

(4) Encourage School Districts to Increase Career and Technology Programs and Continue to Push for Academic and Technical Integration and Contextual/Applied Learning.

Student learning from a contextual perspective has benefits. Contextual learning theory suggests that mastery of subject matter content by students happens better when students process new concepts in a way that makes sense in their own world (Hull and Pedrotti, 1995). A solution is to develop a curriculum and pedagogical approach in which students discover relationships between abstract ideas and real-world workplace applications. If students see relevance and meaning in what they learn, they are more likely to be motivated and maintain a high interest in what they learn -- and remain in school.

(5) Continue to Provide a Comprehensive Developmental Guidance and Counseling Program that Provides All Students With the Necessary Life Skills to be Successful in School and to Become Productive Citizens.

The comprehensive developmental guidance program in Texas public schools is an integral part of the total educational program. It provides a systematic planned approach for helping all students acquire and apply basic life skills by making optional use of the special knowledge and skills of school counselors. The foundation of the program is to provide developmentally appropriate assistance for all students, and at the same time provide special assistance to those who need it. Rather than devise a program for "special" populations of students, implement a comprehensive, developmental guidance program that will address the needs of all students. The Comprehensive Guidance Program for Texas Public Schools: A Guide for Program Development Pre-K - 12th Grade is available for use by districts in implementing this program. It provides all students with the necessary life skills to enable them to be productive citizens.

(6) Promote Collaboration Among Schools, Businesses and Community Organizations in Providing Dropout Prevention and Intervention Programs.

Agency staff and RESC staff should facilitate networking existing established collaboratives with schools without such collaborative arrangements. Agency staff should encourage formation of new collaboratives with rural schools to provide students with real-world connections between school and the workplace.

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(7) **Teach All School Personnel to Recognize Signs of Possible Substance Abuse and the Procedures to Follow if There is a Suspicion of Abuse, and Train Specific Personnel to Deal with those Concerns.**

Training in the recognition of signs and symptoms of drug use and the procedures to follow for intervention and referral may be continued through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act Professional Development Program. Each education service center in the state provides technical assistance, professional development, professional development resources in prevention, and referral resources for all schools in their respective regions through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Professional Development Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH IMMEDIATE FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

(8) **Coordinate State, District, and Community Efforts to Reduce the Dropout Rate. Link Academic, Guidance, and Career Education Programs in this Effort.**

Encourage increased coordination of dropout reduction efforts involving state agencies, school districts, parents, businesses, and other elements of communities. Coordinated efforts form a support net that makes it less likely potential dropouts will slip through the cracks. Individuals responsible for separate state, district, and community programs should meet regularly to understand the student and/or family needs each program serves, link programs when appropriate or beneficial, and develop ways to assist potential dropouts.

(9) **Continue to Phase-In the Extended School Year Initiative to All School Districts in the State. Maintain Local District Options to Participate in Extended-Year Programs.**

Continue to phase-in the extended-year programs to all schools in the state and extend the kindergarten through eighth grade Optional Extended Year Program to cover ninth grade students. A significant decrease in student retention in 1993-94 can be partially attributed to the Retention Reduction Pilot Programs instituted in the 1993-94 school year.

(10) **Furnish Districts with Dropout Reduction Research Findings.**

Provide districts with information about findings from state and national research on dropouts and dropout reduction programs to complement the descriptive data currently provided. Include research findings that focus on specify student groups such as Hispanic students.

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(11) **Provide Professional Development Opportunities for Teachers and Support Staff in Early Identification, Intervention and Effective Instructional Techniques for Students At-Risk of Dropping Out of School.**

The Texas Education Agency will continue to implement strategies and programs in support of its goal of excellence and equity for all students and learners served by the state's public education system. A key strategy requires that teacher employment contracts be extended by five days for a total of ten professional development days for FY 98 while maintaining 180 instructional days. Sufficient staff development time will enable teachers to participate as full partners in the determination of student and campus goals. Additional staff development time could allow the continuation and expansion of training to include such training as the signs and symptoms of drug abuse, violence, and behavior of students in at-risk situations which is currently available through the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program at each Educational Service Center. Staff development should be provided with contextual/applied learning strategies and real-world applications of academic skills. The Texas Education Agency will continue to support staff development efforts through the current and future technology initiatives including Texas School Telecommunication Access Resource (T-STAR), Texas Education Network (TENET), Texas Center for Educational Technology (TCET), Texas Education Telecommunications Network (TETN), Centers for Professional Development and Technology (CPDT), Technology Preview and Training Centers, Technology Demonstration Sites (PETs) and the Texas Library Connection (TLC).

RECOMMENDATIONS WITH LONG-TERM FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

(12) **Implement Alternative Academic Education Programs for Students in At-Risk Situations Such as Evening/Weekend Classes, Credit By Examination, And Credit for Work Experience.**

Some models for successful programs exist. A few alternative academic programs enable enrolled students to combine study toward a Certificate of General Educational Development simultaneously with progress toward a high school diploma. Some progressive school districts have recognized that the knowledge and skills necessary to pass the Tests of General Educational Development have common elements with those necessary to earn credit in key high school courses. These school districts design their programs so that students study, demonstrate mastery, and receive credit for learning that has taken place. Documentation of learning is expressed in terms of the requirements for earning credit in state credit courses. These programs are conducted throughout the traditional school day and, in some cases, in the evening. Students are eligible for credit by examination, as other students are. Schools have the authority to award

credit for work experience, and this often is an important element of successful programs. Work experience includes work for pay and voluntary services. Educators in these progressive programs agree that early identification of capable students who need flexibility increases the likelihood that the students will complete the requirements for a high school diploma rather than earning a Certificate of General Education and withdrawing from school.

Since the mid 1970s, adult educators have offered competency-based high school diploma programs for individuals who are not enrolled in school. Currently, adult educators are tracking the development of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills to ensure that competency-based high school diploma programs for adult students maintain their quality. Instruction is offered at times and locations that have been selected in response to needs assessments. Students are eligible for credit by examination, as other students are. The school district that awards the high school diploma makes policies regarding credit by examination and credit for work experience. These models could be replicated by other local education agencies following thorough needs assessment and planning.

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a nonsegregated basis;

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964 AS AMENDED BY THE EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1972; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; EQUAL PAY ACT OF 1964; TITLE IX, EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED; IMMIGRATION REFORM AND CONTROL ACT OF 1986; AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990; AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1991.

The Texas Education Agency shall comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws, rules, and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any educational programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or disability constitutes a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer.

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